



CASE STUDY REPORT

Inclusion Development Programme (Autism Spectrum): Promoting parental confidence

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This study was originally published in 2010 as part of the 'What Works Well' initiative, part of the National Strategies for Education in England.

Abstract

Background: The purpose of the study was to increase knowledge and build capacity in the area of Autism Spectrum, increase parental confidence, and reduce parental anxiety in order to increase pupil engagement with the curriculum and their peers.

Aims: The main aim is to increase knowledge and build capacity in the area of Autism Spectrum, reduce parental anxiety, and increase pupil engagement with the curriculum and their peers.

Methods: The participants included headteachers, LA advisers, middle leaders, National Strategies consultants, parents, SLT, SIPs, subject leaders, teachers, teaching assistants, and Local Authority staff. The school used a graded evaluation questionnaire, dedicated time for training, parent workshops, communication passports, and observation to measure progress and impact on pupil learning.

Findings: The main findings are that Rushall JMI School has implemented an Autism Spectrum Inclusion Development Programme (AS IDP) to increase staff and parental confidence in the area of Autism Spectrum and SEN, resulting in greater pupil participation, reduced anxiety, and increased collaboration between home and school.

Implications: The findings suggest that a whole school approach to Autism Spectrum and SEN, including parental involvement, can lead to increased pupil participation, reduced anxiety, and greater staff knowledge and confidence.

This abstract was generated by Camtree using a large language model (LLM) and added to the original report in 2023.

Keywords: Primary education; Behaviour and attendance; Cross-agency working; Inclusion; Leadership; Self evaluation and review; Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL); Transfer and transition

Introduction

What were your reasons for doing this type of development work?

Rushall JMI School is a one form entry primary school. The school is funded for fifteen pupils with varying communication needs, including pupils with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and pupils on the Autism Spectrum (AS). The school's reputation in the field of SLCN and Autism is widely acknowledged across the borough of Walsall. As a result the school has an increased number of pupils with SLCN and AS within the mainstream school. Currently the school has 6.4% of pupils with an Autism Spectrum diagnosis. The children come to the school at different times in diagnosis process and therefore parents come to the school with a variety of experiences of the help and support that is available for them and their child.

Following the launch of the Autism Spectrum Inclusion Development Programme (AS IDP) in June 2009 the school was selected to be a pilot school for the programme. This programme has provided the school with a framework to support staff and parents in the area of Autism Spectrum, a need which had been previously identified following consultations with staff and parents.

The need for a coherent partnership between home and school is an essential part of child's academic, social and emotional well-being. In light of the Every Child Matters Agenda (2004) and more recently the Lamb Report (2009), which highlights the need to promote greater parental confidence in the area of special educational needs (SEN), the school wanted to address the need for a more consistent approach within the school and relaunch home-school partnership.

Who might find this case study useful?

- Headteacher
- LA adviser
- Middle leader
- National Strategies consultant
- Parent
- Senior leadership team (SLT)
- SIP (School Improvement Partner)
- Subject leader
- Teacher
- Teaching assistant

Description

What specific curriculum area, subject or aspect did you intend to have impact on?

- All aspects
- All subjects
- Behaviour and attendance
- Cross-agency working
- Inclusion
- Leadership
- Self evaluation and review
- Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL)
- Transfer and transition

How did you intend to impact on pupil learning?

- By increasing knowledge and building capacity in the area of Autism Spectrum the school envisaged staff and parental confidence would grow in order that they would have a greater understanding of the everyday challenges faced by pupils with Autism and SEN.
- By increasing parental confidence the school aimed to reduce parental anxiety and therefore increase pupil engagement with the curriculum and their peers.

What were your success criteria?

- Staff will have a better way to understand parents' concerns.
- Staff will collaborate more openly with parents.
- Staff will hear parent's views and make changes in relation to them.
- Parents will have greater confidence in the school's overall SEN provision.
- Staff will have a greater knowledge and understanding of pupils with AS.
- School will identify clear strategies to support individual pupils and/or parents.

What information or data did you use to measure progress towards your success criteria?

- Learning walks / study visits
- Logs or interviews
- Observation outcomes

Describe the CPD approaches you used

Initially the whole school carried out an audit (self evaluation checklist taken from the Early Years/Primary and Secondary Inclusion Development Programme - supporting pupils on the autism spectrum), for all staff working at Rushall JMI School. This gave the school a starting point, highlighting further training and development for whole school staff. This took the format of whole school training (INSET) on the importance of being communication friendly with particular reference to children on the Autism Spectrum. In this the school emphasised the importance of visual strategies, including Makaton signing. The staff, along with parents, were asked to consider particular pupils with whom they worked, to begin to compile Communication Passports, targeting individual needs of pupils and strategies to support them in class, on the playground, during periods of transition and times outside school. The school worked with parents to ensure that the communication passport supported the child in all areas of their life including play schemes, respite and extended family. To consolidate training, the school dedicated time to enable all staff to work through the AS IDP at their own pace as individuals and small groups. The school reflected upon the checklist data to identify and address individual training needs. The school worked with a small focus group of parents of pupils with an AS diagnosis and/or SEN to ascertain their views, experiences and wishes for the future. The school then used this information to plan for future parent workshops and training in the area of AS and SEN.

Who provided you with support?

- Local authority staff
- Senior management
- Subject leader

How were you supported?

- The school prioritised training in the area of Autism Spectrum and set aside dedicated time to facilitate this. Resources from National Strategies (IDP materials were recommended by Local Education SEN team and implemented within school. The Local Authority provided the school with 3 days release time for key members of staff to prepare training and work alongside parents.
- Parent Partnership along with the school's Advisory teacher worked with the school to plan and deliver parent workshops and whole school training.

Impact

What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

- Pupils are benefiting from staff's greater awareness of pupils' needs and learning styles, and greater parental participation and engagement with the school.
- There is greater pupil participation because planning is more targeted to facilitate meaningful inclusion.
- Pupils' anxieties are reduced because of the use of concrete strategies to support learning, eg visual timelines, Makaton signage, communication key-rings, etc.

Thoughts you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

- Collaboration between home and school has been a major positive impact.
- Quality First training to staff and support to parents.
- Greater awareness of children's needs and learning styles which is approached consistently throughout the school.
- Greater parental confidence in the school's approach to Autism Spectrum and SEN which in turn has reduced parental anxiety and therefore reduced pupil anxiety.

Quotes you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

- The training and the whole school approach has had a positive impact in facilitating greater collaboration between home and school (SENCo)
- The training has enabled the whole school to focus consistently on Autism Spectrum and SEN which had led to greater pupil participation (Headteacher).
- Parents and carers have greater confidence in the school in supporting them and their children. For example- Home school diaries better communication (a parent of a child with Autism Spectrum).
- One mainstream class teacher cited that she was more confident in catering for the range of needs within her class, including their individual learning styles (Year 5 Teacher)
- Lunchtime staff have highlighted their growing awareness of AS and feel much more equipped to understand and manage AS in what is a much less structured time. For example, one lunchtime supervisory assistant, initially unaware of a child's need for routine and structure, lacked empathy and understanding when the pupil's favourite flavoured milkshake was without warning unavailable at snacktime. Following the training this member of staff is now able to work with other members of staff and the child to ensure stocks are maintained or changes are planned for where ever possible. The child is now able to return from snack time ready to learn with reduced anxiety levels.

Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Periodic teacher assessment

Qualitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Learning walks / study visits
- Logs or interviews
- Observation outcomes
- Pupils' work

Describe the evidence of impact on pupil learning

Several parents have stated that their children are more confident as their academic, social and emotional needs are fully being met by the school. The parents feel that the school staff are addressing the whole child so that anxiety is reduced and they can experience success as they work alongside their peers. The increased understanding and awareness of Autism Spectrum by all staff has led to an increasing level of pupil participation, adaptations to the school environment and curriculum.

In addition, the children at the school have fostered a more caring and inclusive ethos towards the area of SEN, whereby every child is respected for their individual difference and valued a member of the school community.

What has been the impact on teaching?

- Greater awareness and confidence in recognising and responding to the needs of children with AS, SEN and individual learning styles.
- Greater multi-sensory approaches to teaching (visual, auditory and kinaesthetic approaches).
- Greater use of concrete strategies to support learning and reduce pupil's anxiety e.g. visual timelines, Makaton signage around school, Communication key rings etc. The school now has an whole school approach to being a communication friendly environment which is evidenced in the school's 'Communication Friendly School 2009/2010' booklet which is also shared with parents. (See below - Children's identities have been hidden for this online version only)
- For example -supply teachers and students are much more well informed and equipped through the regular use of the Communication Passports for pupils within the mainstream and Additionally Resourced Provision (ARP) in order best cater for the children's academic, social and emotional needs.
- Greater levels of parental participation and engagement with school.

Quotes you think are relevant to the impact on teaching

- The whole school consistent approach has ensured that every child has an equal opportunity to be fully included in the life of the school (Headteacher).
- The Communication Passports have meant that all staff, including supply staff and students are fully aware of individual children's learning styles, needs and strategies to help them succeed and participate (Specialist Communication Teacher)

Evidence of impact on teaching

- Evidence from observation and monitoring
- Evidence from planning
- Improvements in curriculum documentation
- Teacher perceptions

Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

- The school now has a clear communication policy which reflects a whole school commitment to a communication friendly approach.
- Planning reflects individual learning styles, including social and emotional needs of the child.
- Lesson observations focus on pupil participation, differentiation and learning styles.
- At the beginning of the pilot study (December 2009) the whole school staff completed a graded evaluation questionnaire in order to gain greater knowledge about whole school staff confidence in the area of Autism Spectrum which allowed the school to tailor training to individuals' needs. At the end of the pilot study (July 2010) the same graded evaluation questionnaire was completed in order to measure gains in confidence. Out of a staff of thirty seven staff 91.4% increased their knowledge, understanding and confidence in the area of Autism Spectrum.
- The school now has a clearer and whole school consistent approach with every member of staff having high expectations for all pupils where they make relevant adaptations and adjustments to ensure that every child has the opportunity to participate, learn and enjoy their time at school.
- Parents have cited that their experience and knowledge of their children is effectively used by the school to ensure that their children are meaningfully and appropriately included in the mainstream and specialist setting.
- Through lesson observations it has been noticed that greater on task behaviour and learning styles are being catered for, including the social and emotional needs of pupils.

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

The leadership team within the school has a strong commitment to raising pupil participation and working in partnership with parents. The school has benefited from:

- Greater engagement with parents and carers of pupils with AS and SEN.
- Greater staff knowledge, understanding and confidence in the areas of AS and SEN (whole school CPD).
- Greater pupil participation through thoughtful planning, monitoring and engagement with pupils.
- Greater levels of consistency throughout the school in the areas of AS and SEN.
- A clearer whole school vision in working with parents and carers of pupils with AS and SEN.

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

The school leadership has:

- devoted time in the coming academic year to embed this new training as part of its whole school philosophy, which is reflected in the School Development Plan.
- carried out observations of teaching that have had a clear focus on learning styles, pupil participation and differentiation.
- monitored planning regularly to evaluate current provisions and practice.

Summary

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

- Whole school approach where everybody is part of the team and responsible for the success, including parents and children.
- Having the senior leadership as the driving force for the AS IDP has ensured that on going training in

the area of AS and SEN is a whole school priority.

- Having the dedicated time to work through the AS IDP resources coupled with the quality time to discuss and reflect has meant that the school has had the opportunity to critically evaluate current practice and make appropriate changes to increase pupil participation and parental confidence.

What key resources would people who want to learn from your experience need access to?

- Autism Spectrum Inclusion Development Programme Early Years Foundation Stage- Ref 00040-2009BKT-EN
- Autism Spectrum Inclusion Development Programme Primary and Secondary- Ref 00041-2009DVD-EN
- Primary Talk Training folder Supportive and Enhance Level- ICan (The Communication Charity)
- Makaton Charity materials for local tutors
- Walsall Local Authority "Being Communication Friendly" three day course.

What CPD session and resources were particularly useful?

- Communication passport clips
- The Autism Spectrum self-evaluation checklist
- The real life stories of children, parents and schools

If another individual or school was attempting to replicate this work, where would they start and what would the essential elements be?

- Schools need to have a strong whole school commitment to raising pupil participation.
- The graded evaluation checklist should be completed by all staff members to highlight staff strengths and areas for further development so that targeting training can be carried out.
- Key members of staff need to have quality time to familiarise themselves with the AS IDP resources, preferably in small groups to generate discussion and address any misconceptions or preconceived ideas.
- AS IDP resources need to be worked through at the participants' own pace in order understand and consolidate new learning. This can take the form of whole school training, small group work or individual work.
- New initiatives and any changes to practice should be considered and adopted by all school staff so that there is a consistent approach.
- It is essential to periodically evaluate the impact of the programme in order to share successes and target identified areas.

What further developments are you planning to do (or would you like to see others do)?

- Over the next academic year the school have already put in place training and continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities to embed this area of work in order build and enrich capacity in the areas of Autism Spectrum, SEN and individual learning styles.
- In the new academic year the school plans to build on existing positive parental involvement and aim to embed parental confidence further by holding monthly parental workshops/parent forums.
- As part of the school's whole school commitment to building capacity in other schools in Walsall LA in the areas of AS and SEN, the school will use the AS IDP materials as a starting point when supporting and advising other schools in our capacity as an outreach provider.

Supplementary Materials

This report is accompanied in the library by the following supplementary material:

- Example of School passport.doc
- Autism Spectrum IDP Action Plan Jan 2010.doc
- Communication Friendly booklet.pdf

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This case study was originally published as part of the 'What Works Well' section of the National Strategies for Education in England. The National Strategies were professional programmes aiming for improvements in the quality of learning and teaching in schools in England. 'What Works Well' involved teaching practitioners from all phases and areas of education sharing accounts of real developments which had improved learning and teaching, and made a difference to pupil progress. 'What Works Well' case studies were designed to support practice transfer and include sufficient detail and resources to enable others to implement the effective practice described. They were reviewed by experts prior to publication as 'User Generated Content' (UGC) under a licence which encouraged reuse and derivative works, but which precluded commercial use.

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